

## THE SWAN SONG OF "TRILBY."--BY ALAN DALE.



"TRILBY" is dead. Oh, mourn for the brave, the brave that are no more! The astonishingly popular story that was epidemic on two continents has flickered again at the Knickerbocker Theatre, with Beerbohm Tree and Kate Rorke as revivals, and the light has gone out forever. New Yorkers can now sing a requiem to the soul of Du Maurier's heroine if she had one, which I am inclined to doubt--and the music hall artists can chant ditties about Trilby's vacant chair--thus giving poor manner (the usual assassin of the vacant chair) a long needed rest. Even Kewpie might wax poetic and sentimental on this melancholy topic.

I call it melancholy, because the cessation of anything is generally supposed to be melancholy, but in my heart of hearts I cannot help believing that Trilby's demise is best for us, and best for her. "Trilby" was a fad and nothing more. During the early part of its career I used to hear it compared to the bicycle mania. The bicycle, however, is still alive, in all its ravaging fury. "Trilby" is dead--sunk in the wave of oblivion. Fads never last. The unthinking ones, judging by the temporary frenzy that they induce, are unable to see restored normality in view. "Trilby" initiated, however, are perfectly able to spot a fad as soon as it appears. "Trilby" had feet, but no backbone. Those poetic pedal extremities permitted her to stand while we wanted her. Her lack of backbone, however, prevented her resistance to heels, kaleidoscope opinions--when he didn't want her. And the day has at last come when we can laugh at poor Trilby. We all went to the Knickerbocker during the past week, not to see a play, the very details of which inspire us with nausea, but to compare the acting of Beerbohm Tree and Miss Rorke with that of Wilton Lackaye and Virginia Harned. It wasn't the play, but the actors therein, that interested us. Comparison is the very last resort of an amusement-seeking public, and it is a result that can be indulged in but once. If Irving took it into his head to play Svengali, and Miss Terry decided to appear as Trilby, I don't believe that we should go to see them. We have had a fine American presentation of the play, and curiosity has just impelled us to look at the English version.

Five women stepped on poor Trilby's feet, and were propelled thereby into public favor. These five women were Virginia Harned, Blanche Walsh, Edith Crane, Dorothea Baird and Kate Rorke. All these ladies did their best to prove--what Du Maurier didn't want to prove--that Trilby was a somewhat spotless slave; a victim to the wiles of a hypnotist, and that her "vices" were quite immaterial to the issue. The novelist insisted upon Trilby's past, Paul Potter, always noble and sympathetic, copied them all off, and the consequence was that every actress on the stage wanted to play Trilby.

If the play had not been merely a fad, and had lived, just picture the horror of our position. "Trilby" would have been thrust into our ears by every stage aspirant, just as "Camille" and "Romeo and Juliet" are inflicted upon us to-day. "Camille," unfortunately, has backbone, and will live. "Romeo and Juliet" is Shakespearean, and if we dropped in sheer fatigue at the vagaries of the Capulet and Montague history, we should never dare to say so. The rage for the Trilby character, while it lasted, was intense. Every actress dreamed of its ravages looked upon her as a splendid medium for recovering lost vitality, "booming aspirants" took their feet into the managerial's sancta gail, and, "I can play Trilby. Look at my footies." Miss Virginia Harned owns the honor of having "created" Trilby. Her selection was not made carelessly. It was at first thought advisable to secure an unknown woman, who, by the sheer force of her personal appearance, could suggest the Du Maurier picture. But New York managers have a horror of unknown people. So extreme is

this horror that the time has arrived when actors and actresses can only win fame by mere chance. An "understudy" can become popular by reason of a star's sore throat or irremediable headache. An actress called on at the last moment may risk everything or win all. The people without names are to be pitied, because managers want ready-made goods, just as very frequently as they want ready-made successes, and go to London or Paris for them. Consequently, the notion of engaging a nobody for Trilby was vigorously rejected.

Miss Harned, who didn't look the part in the least, and whose hazy afterthoughts were distinctly opposed to the Du Maurier idea, was chosen, and she was the Trilby who burst upon us at the Garden Theatre twenty months ago. Mr. Potter had, fortunately, built up his play around Svengali, so that the Trilby was really a very easy part to play--the conventional role of the trusting and guileless heroine suddenly confronted with a green-eyed bugaboo, anxious to lure her to her ruin--as the saying goes. Miss Harned succeeded, because Miss Harned has a distinct individuality of her own, and was not taking to be crushed by a stupid imitator with feet instead of brains. She used her brains, and she prevented Wilton Lackaye from securing all the attention. An "unknown woman" would have unconsciously played into Mr. Lackaye's hands, and he would have walked away with everything portable.

At the Knickerbocker Theatre this is precisely what Beerbohm Tree does. He is a star--a very green star, as I told you a couple of weeks ago. He was present at the first American performance of "Trilby," and his diplomatic eye was not long in discovering what immense possibilities lurked in the play--for himself. He saw that Mr. Potter had subjugated Trilby to Svengali, and he said to himself: "I can do more. I can make the play all Svengali. I want the place, and that is what I'll do with it."

In London, where the case for ready-made people is less vicious than it is in this country, Du Maurier "circulated" and hunted a Trilby who would look like his picture. He found Miss Dorothea Baird, a young woman to fortune and to fame unknown. Tree was, of course, quite willing. He could have got Mrs. Patrick Campbell, I presume, but Mrs. Campbell would have injected some quietly noticeable excuse into Du Maurier's bloodless heroine, and Tree was not anxious for that. Miss Baird, a very beautiful girl, played Trilby in London, and saw her at the Haymarket last summer. She was what we call a stock. She looked like Trilby, but she never acted it, whereas Miss Harned acted it, but didn't look it. Miss Baird was really dreadful, I thought. Clement Scott also thought so, and said so, and was ferociously "pumped upon." Tree, however, was enthusiastically satisfied, and he jolted up Svengali until it glittered like some devilish jewel. The "Trilby" at the Haymarket is all Svengali--even more than Mr. Potter intended that it should be. Kate Rorke is a better actress than Miss Baird, but she is also Tree'd into subjection.

In New York the fact that Svengali was not a star, as played by Wilton Lackaye, W. H. Thompson and an actor named Kent, urged the play on for the women. It is women that we want, as I've told you before, and actresses rushed at the role that Miss Harned had filled. Miss Blanche Walsh succeeded her, and that the unnamed Fourth Ward is more capable of producing complete actresses than the tutored conservatory needed over by Nelson Wheatcroft. Miss Walsh is a remarkably clever young woman. She has magnetism, good looks and individuality. She has never contented herself with the crashing

can do, and her Trilby was in many respects superior to that of Virginia Harned. Perhaps there is some link that connects the Fourth Ward of New York with the Quarter Latin of Paris. We don't get many pictures of the Fourth Ward, but we do get masses of inaccurate information about the Quarter Latin, which is not nearly as picturesque as people imagine it to be.

I did not see Miss Edith Crane as Trilby, and I regret it, because she is the only woman of the five I have mentioned who can look as Du Maurier wished his heroine to look, and who can act as well. Miss Crane belonged to "the road." That region frequently secures valuable actors and actresses, because managers give it the people who haven't "names." Miss Crane had no name of any consequence. Miss Harned and Miss Walsh had metropolitan "endorsements," and these were made to answer all requirements, their dramatic powers being of secondary importance.

"Trilby" is dead, and her ghosts haunt this page for the last time. Methinks that if Mr. Potter would have made this heroine as conspicuous as was her hypnotizing husband, the play would have been alive to-day. It is the feminine element that interests this American public. It is the feminine element that must be held up and loved and gaily and grandly to prominence. This is perhaps human nature. American audiences are full of human nature. They paid all due allegiance to Svengali. We acknowledged the admirable work of Mr. Lackaye. They poured their dollars into the laps of A. M. Palmer, Paul Potter and--or--the Harper Brothers, but "Trilby" had no staying powers. It was a hobby, an ephemeral craze, because the simple woman-story was backgrounded by the infernal hypnotic feature.

If Sarah Bernhardt had thought it to interest herself in "Trilby," and as Trilby had one of Sarah's death scenes, I really don't see why she couldn't have been induced to do so. "Trilby" would have become a classic instead of a fad. Sarah would have gone to a Sardan or a Rheims, and Trilby would have been hushed with a rich and a tragic life. Her possibilities would not have been eliminated, but would have served as a rock upon which to build the tragedy of her life. Svengali would have been a mere wheel in the machinery that caused the drama to move, and the play would have been alive to-day. It would have been no more of a fad than were "Fédora," "La Tosca," "Camille," "Adrienne Lecouvreur" or the other roles with which Sarah has enriched the dramatic history of to-day. It would not have lived as rapidly as Mr. Potter's play has done, but it would have lived longer. It is not always by a rush that we achieve permanent results.

"Trilby" is dead. Cause: Anemia of the feet. Into the twenty months of its life was crowded all the faddery that a fed-up public could possibly produce. It did no harm. It entertained hundreds of thousands of people--the herd--that rushes in where the leader says "You shall go." It permitted competent actresses to show that paid getting coins for nothing in the fever of hobbism. Nobody ever gave any advice to Miss Harned. Nobody ever gave any advice to Miss Crane or Miss Walsh. Nobody paid much attention to them. It was the play and it was Svengali--that were advertised and boomed, and poor Trilby suffered.

'Tis best for us, and 'tis best for her. If she had lived, in Mr. Potter's outfit, she would have been, as I have before said, a substance from which there would have been no escape. We could not have endured her. She would have become an "Uncle Tom's Cabin" or a "Two Orphans," and her name would have

Before Miss Blanche Walsh dies, I hope that she will make it her duty to set some imaginative author at work to poetize her birthplace. It is rough and unkempt, but so is the Quarter Latin. Henri Murger disdained the Quarter Latin in such attractive colors that all the world believed it to be some gay but impeccable spot, where bees draw honey from all sorts and conditions of flowers--and don't pay for it. Nothing could be more absurd. The Quarter Latin is gross and slummy as the Fourth Ward in many respects, and Miss Walsh owes it to herself to redeem it from the contempt in which it is swamped.

If I were she, I should be much prouder of my birth there than Mrs. James Brown Potter can possibly be of her cotton-wool Fifth Avenue surroundings. Nobody has ever commented on a native of the Fourth Ward being called upon to impersonate a resident of the Quarter Latin. Yet that is what Blanche Walsh did, and did remarkably well. If Mr. Potter had filled his play with a little more of Trilby and a little less of Svengali, Miss Walsh would have stepped into lasting renown, and the Fourth Ward of New York would have been "written up" as its Quarter Latin.

It is seldom that plays die. They cease, but they're never again. Make a fad of them, however, and they will rush on to their end. Nothing is so fatal to permanent value as hobbism, without backbone. It appeals to us while it is with us. Ignorant people say, "It will last forever. It can never play itself out." But it does, and it must always do so. How the managers chuckled as they read of Trilby cigarettes and Trilby stockings and Trilby gloves and Trilby foods. Such a boom was never known. The name of the play and of the novel went into every corner of the United States. Even Philadelphia, I am told, heard of it. It forgot ahead, and no effort was made to stop it. The boom burst, as all booms must. It was picked into collapse by the very chameleonlike public that had assisted it to a pinched position.

Miss Harned flew from Trilby and ran for protection to E. H. Sothern, whom she married. Miss Dorothea Baird, which that she was, felt a similar need for a conjugal shelter. She dropped "Trilby" as soon as she could and became a bride of Irving's son. Miss Walsh put the ocean between her and Mr. Potter's devilized lady and crossed to Australia. Miss Rorke seeks a panacea in a repertoire and carries "Trilby" with Henry Arthur Jones and Gilbert Parker. Miss Crane has sought the stellar guidances of Maurice Barrymore and New York is unaware of the fact that she ever played Trilby.

All the Trilbys are disconsolate. The Svengalis are alone happy. Tree adores his part, and by his own choice has placed it at the Knickerbocker Theatre. Lackaye would, I feel quite convinced, mortgage his furniture for another opportunity to exorcise the prominence that his Svengali brought him. The Svengalis, however, can no longer hypnotize the Trilbys. Those heroines have renounced themselves from all further possibilities of victimization. No new crop will ever occur at any time. The soil has become sterile forever.

"Trilby" is dead. Let us toll a bell or two for her. Let us remember that we liked her while she was with us, because Mr. Potter had taken away all the opportunities for disliking her. Those opportunities might have saved her. Ten years from now we shall wonder what "Trilby" was--whether clothes, food or drink. And Miss Harned, Miss Walsh, Miss Crane, Miss Baird and Miss Rorke, who will be ten years older--if they are not ten years younger--will perhaps hesitate at supplying the required information.

Ta-ta, "Trilby."

ALAN DALE.

